

Consumer Council for Northern Ireland



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2016-17

Contact:

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17:

[http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/filestore/documents/The Consumer Council Annual Report and Accounts 2016 2017.pdf](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/filestore/documents/The_Consumer_Council_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2016_2017.pdf)

Draft Corporate Plan for 2016-21 and Forward Work Programme for 2016-17 (pending finalisation of the Programme for Government and Ministerial approval):

<http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/events/draft-corporate-plan-and-draft-forward-work-programme-consultation-event/>

Signature:

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2016 and March 2017

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

- 1 In 2017-18, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

In the context of The Consumer Council's statutory remit, it is recognised that being fit for purpose requires an unequivocal commitment to equality and good relations. The Consumer Council's work priorities are shaped by its statutory equality duties under Section 75 of the *Northern Ireland Act* and the *Disability Discrimination Act and Order*.

The Consumer Council's outreach activities aim to reach out to consumers in Northern Ireland who need support, with a particular focus on 'hard to reach' consumers and those in greatest need. Our approach is driven by the core aims of our Corporate Plan 2016-2021.

The Consumer Council builds equality into all policies, services, and work programmes from the early stages of project planning and policy development.

The Consumer Council responds to government consultations, represents consumers' views, and makes recommendations on public policy changes. Policy responses are available on The Consumer Council's website www.consumerCouncil.org.uk.

Key equality outcomes achieved during 2016-17 were:

- Undertook our role as the complaint handling body for Regulation (EC) 1107/2006 and Regulation (EU) 1177/2010, which gives passengers rights to special assistance when travelling by air or by ferry respectively. Equality categories impacted: disability;
- Provided support to vulnerable consumers who had complaints in respect of energy, postal services, transport, or water matters. Equality categories impacted: age and disability;
- In partnership with representative organisations of disabled consumers, conducted audits of the City of Derry Airport and made recommendations to improve accessibility to the port operator and ferry companies. Equality categories impacted: disability;

PART A

- Undertook work to assess the impact of the Network Transformation Programme on Post Office users. The requirements of more vulnerable consumers are a particular focus of our work in this area. Most recommendations promulgated by the Consumer Council were accepted by Post Office Limited. Equality categories impacted: age and disability;
- Held discussions with the main banks operating in NI on a range of issues affecting vulnerable consumers, such as bank branch closures, digital inclusion, and the financial abuse of older people. Equality categories impacted: age and disability;
- Worked in partnership with LINK to complete a programme of work to ensure that 75 economically deprived areas have access to fee-free ATMs. A new list of 43 target areas has been agreed with LINK. Equality categories impacted: age, dependents, disability, gender, marital status, and race; and
- Launched a partnership with Girlguiding Ulster to develop the 'Guided Consumer' initiative and resource pack. This was piloted successfully with a group in Bangor, and will be rolled out across NI. quality categories impacted: age.

2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2016-17 *(or append the plan with progress/examples identified)*.

See Q1 (above).

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2016-17 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No (go to Q.4) Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

The changes apply to policy, practice, procedures, and service delivery of bodies that the Consumer Council monitors rather than our own.

3a With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

PART A

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

- As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

- As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

- As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

- As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

- Other *(please specify and give details):*

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2016-17 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Given our statutory role to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland, particularly vulnerable consumers, equality duties are mainstreamed in the work undertaken by most Consumer Council staff. However, Section 75 is not explicitly referenced.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2016-17 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

As Q4 above.

6 In the 2016-17 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

- Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- Yes, in some departments/jobs
- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2013-14 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Corporate Plan for 2016-21, and annual business plans to implement this, include Equality Plans.

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2016-17 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions
completed:

23

Actions ongoing:

0

Actions to
commence:

0

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

The ongoing equality actions included in the Business Plan for 2016-17 are:

- Providing additional support to vulnerable consumers in handling energy, postal, transport and water complaints as set out in the relevant legislation;
- Representing the views of consumers in respect of changes and implementation of policy on key consumer issues, and in regulated markets, in line with the Consumer Council's statutory remit; and
- Ensuring that consumers benefit from a sustainable post office network where they can access products and services that meet their needs through the Network Transformation Programme – this is due to be completed in 2018.

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2016-17 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2016-17 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

- Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: (*tick one box only*)

- All the time
- Sometimes
- Never

PART A

- 11** Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2016-17 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

Active involvement of disabled people in conducting site visits to audit the accessibility of ferry ports and terminals. This built on the previous year's work to audit the accessibility of Belfast City and Belfast International airports and ferry terminals.

- 12** In the 2016-17 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: (*tick all that apply*)

- Face to face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations
- Other (*please specify*): Quantitative survey

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

The Consumer Council consulted on its draft Forward Work Programme for 2016-17, we used a variety of means to do this:

- Face to Face discussions;
- Public Consultation Event;
- Online Survey Monkey; and
- Formal Consultation response.

- 13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2016-17 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2016-17 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes No Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

15 Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

0

As the Equality Scheme is integrated into the Corporate Plan for the period 2016-2021, equality is mainstreamed into all our annual plans and strategies that flow from these.

In terms of our governance and employment policies, these are those of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and therefore subject to screening and equality impact assessment by the NICS.

In light of the above, no strategies or policies required screening or equality impact assessment by the Consumer Council during the last year.

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2016-17:

0	Policy consultations conducted with screening assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted with an equality impact assessment (EQIA) presented.
0	Consultations for an EQIA alone.

17 Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

Not applicable.

PART A

18 Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes No concerns were raised No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19 Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2016-17 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

20 From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2016-17 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes No, already taken place
 No, scheduled to take place at a later date Not applicable

Please provide any details:

The effectiveness of new equality monitoring arrangements for users of our Consumer Support service, implemented in April 2014, was reviewed. No changes were required.

21 In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The monitoring data previously showed that people from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background appeared to be under-represented among the users of the Consumer Support Service. However, our analysis showed that the proportion of users of this service in 2015-16 was consistent with the population at large.

Nevertheless, given the small sample size, this data is treated with caution. This is an area we will continue to monitor and, as set out in Q2, there may be opportunities to increase referrals through our work with the partners to the Consumer Rights Initiative NI.

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2015-16 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

See Q21 above

- 23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

See Q21 above

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

- 24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2015-16, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

The Consumer Council engaged Action Mental Health to deliver an awareness raising workshop to staff on mental health.

- 25** Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

The above workshop helped staff recognise and deal with mental health issues in themselves and others.

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

- 26 Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2016-17, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

See Q21 above. However, given the relatively small sample size, we have not drawn any conclusions about whether the increase has resulted from actions taken by the Consumer Council (eg publishing information on our then new website (launched in 2014-15) on how to make a complaint against a service provider available in a range of languages).

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

- 27 How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2016-17?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

- 28 Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

2017-18

- 29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

Key priorities will be reviewing the Consumer Council's Equality Scheme and, following a restructuring exercise and reallocation of duties, training for relevant staff on S75.

PART A

30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2017-18) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:

7

Fully achieved

1

Partially achieved

2

Not achieved

2. Please outline below details on all actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
National ⁱⁱⁱ	Designated complaint handling body for Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2006 (access to air travel).	This allows us to take complaints from passengers with reduced mobility and to work with the industry to improve services to disabled passengers. 3 complaints were handled under this Regulation; advice was provided in 9 other cases.	99% customer satisfaction rating achieved in 2015-16.

PART B

	Designated complaint handling body for the Maritime Passenger Regulation (EU) No. 1177/2010, which provides protection for disabled ferry passengers	This allows us to take complaints from passengers with reduced mobility and to work with the industry to improve services to disabled passengers. No complaints were handled under this Regulation; advice was provided in 16 cases.	99% customer satisfaction rating achieved in 2015-16.
	Provide additional support to vulnerable consumers who had complaints in respect of energy, postal services, public transport, or water matters.	Additional support to 52 vulnerable consumers who had complaints in respect of energy, postal services, transport, or water matters.	99% customer satisfaction rating achieved in 2015-16.
	Encourage the participation by disabled people in public life by working with DETI to promote the appointment of disabled Board members in line with the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.	The advertisements welcomed applications from disabled people and guaranteed interviews to disabled applicants.	At least one disabled Board member was appointed out of five appointees that took up office from 1 January 2016. However, equality monitoring data is held by DETI (now the Department for the Economy) and therefore the full extent of the participation of disabled people on the Consumer Council's Board is not known.

PART B

	<p>Promote and improve awareness of air passenger rights among passengers and service providers.</p>	<p>Produced, in partnership with Autism NI, a factsheet providing information for people with autism when travelling by air.</p>	<p>The factsheet was widely disseminated to Autism NI's members, and to the airport operators.</p>
	<p>Promote and improve awareness of ferry passenger rights among passengers and service providers.</p>	<p>In partnership with representative organisations of disabled consumers, conducted audits of the main passenger ferry terminals and made recommendations to improve accessibility to the port operator and ferry companies.</p>	<p>Recommendations for change accepted by the port operator and ferry companies.</p>
	<p>Continued to assess the impact of the Network Transformation Programme on Post Office users. The requirements of more vulnerable consumers are a particular focus of our work in this area. Most recommendations promulgated by the Consumer Council were accepted by Post Office Limited (POL).</p>	<p>The Consumer Council reviewed 97 proposals under the Network Transformation Programme (NTP), and over 2,000 consumer responses to these.</p>	<p>We worked with POL to make sure all the issues were identified and action was taken to address any concerns. We received assurances from POL on a range of issues for most proposals. In addition, where improvements were required, we discussed these with POL to address consumers' concerns.</p>

			Our discussions led to improvements in 55% of cases where post offices moved location as part of the NTP.
	To improve consumers' skills through the provision of information and guidance to help them get the best deal, targeting vulnerable consumers.	<p>39 events direct consumer contact events were held, attracting almost 2,000 consumers.</p> <p>The events included five 'Power to the Pocket' workshops, which attracted over 80 participants. These are 'train the trainer' events aimed at frontline workers from community, voluntary, advice, and social care sectors who are then able to cascade the information and advice to their service users.</p>	<p>The participants at the 'Power to the Pocket' workshops included representatives from organisations working directly with disabled people, such as Action Mental Health, Disability Action, RNIB, the Stroke Association. There were also representatives from bodies such as Advice NI, Citizens Advice, and housing associations, which also provide support to disabled people.</p> <p>The response rate to our longitudinal evaluation has been limited, but this suggests that on average each participant used the information provided with 20 clients. We are looking to improve our measurement methodology for this area.</p>

PART B

Regional ^{iv}	Not applicable		
Local ^v	Not applicable		

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Staff awareness training on mental health issues	Workshops held November 2016.	All Consumer Council staff trained to recognise and deal with mental health issues in themselves and others.

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period? **None**

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact

PART B

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	See 2(a) above in respect of the public appointments process.		

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above: **None**

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows: **None**

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestonesvi / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved

4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1	Explore options to offer work experience to disabled students and trainees.	Severe budget constraints meant that this option could not be pursued.
2	Review the equality composition of the Consumer Council’s staff group and develop an affirmative action plan to address any under-representation, as appropriate.	This was not carried out in 2015-16 because of ongoing voluntary exits and planned restructuring in 2016-17. This will be carried out once these activities have been completed.

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

The Consumer Council uses focus groups of consumers to explore key policy issues.

(b) Quantitative

Complaints handling database

Consumer Outlook Index – an omnibus survey conducted every six months.

Other research commissioned to explore key policy issues.

PART B

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

Not applicable as such, but the Consumer Council develops a new equality plan each year to address key emerging issues that have been highlighted by research or from our stakeholders.

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation’s annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

Yes, see Q6 above.

ⁱ **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

ⁱⁱ **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

ⁱⁱⁱ **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

^{iv} **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

^v **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.

^{vi} **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.